

Nationally Prominent, Low-Key at Home

Thursday, October 3, 1996

Duxbury Mariner

With its understated sign, people may wonder what goes on in the group of buildings off Washington Street that are home to Battelle Ocean Sciences.

But understatement is exactly the point for a company with a national profile seeking to blend into Duxbury's residential surroundings.

"We try to be a very subtle neighbor. We try to be low-key," said Joan Sundstrom, Battelle's director of marketing and human resources.

Battelle let down the low profile last Saturday, however, long enough for an estimated crowd of 500 to 600 people to walk through its halls and grounds. To celebrate more than 50 years of marine research in Duxbury, the company held its first open house since 1987.

Battelle's history dates back to the 1930s, when scientist William F. Clapp's work with shipworms and marine borers, saltwater organisms, moved him to come to the aid when a shipworm attack hit Plymouth Harbor. As an offshoot of lending his services freely, Clapp officially formed the nonprofit Wm. F. Clapp Laboratories in 1946. It eventually became associated with Battelle Memorial Institute of Columbus, Ohio. Since then, the laboratories have been modernized with state-of-the-art technology to suit Battelle's multiple functions.

Ranging from aiding in the cleanup of the world's oil spills, including the Exxon Valdez spill, to providing space for the Backyard Bay program, geared toward helping Duxbury students understand and appreciate the town's ecosystem, Battelle extends its hand on both small and large scales.

"Battelle doesn't view Duxbury as just another town which it does business in," Battelle director Tony Graffeo said in a speech at the open house. "We hope Duxbury doesn't regard Battelle as just another business in town."

As part of that community effort, Battelle has sponsored the Duxbury Beach Sweep and the school science fairs for the last decade. It also analyzed the initial silt drawn up in the dredging of Duxbury Harbor. For the last five years, Battelle has provided space for the Backyard Bay program. It has also lent its facilities to the Boy Scouts and other groups that need space.

— Lesley Mahoney



Hannah, 3, and Leah Pizzella, 7, inspect a dish and sponge for tiny marine borers.